

SPORT

feeling positive
Team SA ready for World Table Tennis Championships
Page 14



overlooked legacy
Chiefs players don't realise how big this club is — ex-captain Tovey
Page 15



The Herald **master classes**

VITAMIN SEA
Simply seafood



SEE PAGE 4 FOR DETAILS

Top-class field expected for Bay race

● About 1,500 elite athletes set to compete in NMB Half Marathon

Vuyokazi Nkanjani

Event organisers say road running fans can expect fireworks at the Nelson Mandela Bay Half Marathon, doubling up as the SA Championships, at Pollok Beach on June 3.

The event, organised by Eastern Province Athletics in partnership with the Nelson Mandela Bay municipality, saw a thrilling finish last year when Lesotho's Namakoe Nkhosi won in a personal best time of 1hr 1min 1sec, narrowly beating hometown favourite Melikhaya Frans by seconds.

Frans smashed his lifetime best by more than a minute as he set a new EP record and at the same time won his first national title in 1:01:03.

Nkhosi and Frans will be on the starting line again next month, with hot competition from Kenya's Kipkemoi Kiprono and Ethiopia's Dinkalem Ayele who are looking to improve their personal bests.

Desmond Zibi of Ikhamva Athletics Club will have the EP

55-59 age group record of 1:12:30 in his sights, which he narrowly missed last year.

Race director Michael Mbambani said they were expecting about 1,500 local, national and international elite athletes to take part.

He said it was all systems go in preparation for the event, but he hoped the weather played along on the day.

"You can expect fireworks because we can see across the country that South African athletes are improving and are in good shape, and with good weather, records might vanish," Mbambani said.

"Besides that, we are all ready to deliver another successful race.

"It's only the weather that's between us and the goods on the day.

"In the men's race, I can say that the title will stay in SA.

"If it's not Gqeberha athletes — between Thabang Mosiako and Melikhaya Frans — it will be from another province.

"We are not seeing them letting it go because it's good

prize money and also a selection event for the World Half Marathon Championships."

Mbambani said he was delighted with how the event had grown over the years.

"The brains behind this SA Half Marathon are myself and Alan Taylor.

"We said Cape Town had Two Oceans, Durban had Comrades and Johannesburg has the Soweto Marathon.

"I said to Alan let's look at something and see what we can do which is different from the rest because everyone seems to talk about ultras.

"This is the biggest half-marathon in the country and it's the richest in the country in terms of prize money.

"We are paying nearly R600,000 in cash prize money for this race," Mbambani said.

Last year's women's race was dominated by Ethiopia's Ftaw Zeray, who led from gun to tape to win in 1:06:57.

However, she will not be competing this year.

Another Ethiopian who is among the confirmed competi-

tors, Genet Habela Abdurkadir, is looking forward to improving her personal best time of 1:12:57 from when she last competed in the 2018 edition.

Emma Pallant, recent winner of the Two Oceans Half Marathon — her first attempt at this distance — aims to push for a faster time in Gqeberha.

Ethiopia's Chaltu Bedo, who boasts a personal best half-marathon time of 1:11:50, is also in the field.

Sport, recreation, arts and culture political head Bassie Kamana has given strict instructions to local elite athletes ahead of the event.

"I request, no, I demand that the title stays here at home, you must defend the coast.

"It's you who makes us beautiful and it's you who makes us proud."

At stake is not only the SA title but also valuable World Athletics Ranking points and R80,000 for first place.

The total prize pot is R553,000, with the added bonus of R152,100 in ASA Championship prize money.



AMONG THE BEST: Attending the launch of the NMB Half Marathon yesterday are, from left, Gqeberha athlete Thabang Mosiako, race director Michael Mbambani and the Bay's Melikhaya Frans. Picture: FREDLIN ADRIAAN

Munster believe they can defeat Stormers